GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Income Security Programs

Annual Report 2013/14

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

December 2014

Education, Culture and Employment

GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Income Security Programs

Annual Report 2013/14

Table of Contents

Director's Statement 1

Report Overview 2

- Vision 2
- Guiding Principles 2
- Service Level Standards 3

Income Assistance 4

- Program Overview 4
- Productive Choice 4
- Program Accomplishments 5
- Audit and Compliance 6
- Appeals 6

Senior Home Heating Subsidy 8

- Program Overview 8
- Program Accomplishments 8
- Audit and Compliance 10
- Appeals 10

Student Financial Assistance 11

- Program Overview 11
- Program Accomplishments 12
- Audit and Compliance 12
- Appeals 13

Other Income Security Programs 14

- Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit 14
- Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit 14
- Territorial Workers' Supplement 15

Income Security Programs Division Overview 16

- Organizational Structure 16
- Roles and Responsibilities 17
- Staffing 20
- Workplace Safety 20
- Training 21

Conclusion 24

Contact Information 25

Appendix A 26

- Summary of Commitments made to the Auditor General of Canada 26

Appendix B 31

- Figures 31

Director's Statement

A Message from the Director, Income Security Programs

I am pleased to present the inaugural 2013-2014 Income Security Programs Annual Report.

This report is intended to provide the public with pertinent information on program operations and client services. It also highlights the progress made over the 2013-2014 fiscal year as we continue to implement our commitments in response to the Auditor General's recommendations.

Significant accomplishments over the past year include a reduced number of Income Assistance recipients, an increase in the number of seniors receiving the Senior Home Heating Subsidy, and increased Student Financial Assistance benefits. Great achievements were also made to enhance training for staff. We have made a great deal of progress and are on target to fulfill our commitments to the Auditor General, but there is still work to be done.

As Director, I am committed to accountability and transparency of departmental operations. I am encouraged by the great attention given to the delivery of high caliber programs and services to the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you,

Lois Walbourne
Director, Income Security Programs

Report Overview

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) made a commitment to develop an Income Security Programs Annual Report in response to the *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly – 2013*. This first Annual Report will detail program accomplishments, as well as review the organizational structure of the Income Security Programs Division. The vision, guiding principles, and dedication of a service-oriented team are some of the tools that contributed to the continued support and growth of a self-reliant Northwest Territories.

Income Security Programs include:

- Income Assistance
- Senior Home Heating Subsidy
- Student Financial Assistance
- Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit
- Northwest Territories Child Benefit/Territorial Workers' Supplement

For each Income Security program, an overview is provided that includes statistics on caseloads and expenditures over the previous five fiscal years. Significant program accomplishments are highlighted and future initiatives are outlined. Other pertinent program information discussed includes audit and compliance, and appeals.

The organizational structure of the Income Security Programs Division is provided, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the different units within the division. Staffing statistics are discussed and information is given on workplace safety and training initiatives. In addition, the appendix provides an overall summary of the commitments that were made to the Auditor General of Canada.

Vision

Income Security Programs, in combination with developmental opportunities, help Northerners become self-reliant as individual capacity allows, to participate fully in community life, and to share in the opportunities available to them.

Guiding Principles

- Encourage self-reliance
- Treat individuals with respect and dignity
- Have clear policies and procedures
- Target benefits to those most in need

While delivering quality service in the Northwest Territories is the primary focus, it is also important to maintain residents' confidence and trust in the integrity of the administration and delivery of Income Security programming. Service level standards ensure that the right person receives the right service or benefit at the right time and for the intended purpose.

Service Level Standards

The Income Security Programs Division strives to:

- Provide courteous, quality service;
- Treat individuals with dignity and respect;
- Protect personal information and correct personal information if there has been an error or omission;
- Only use personal information for the purpose of determining program eligibility;
- Welcome a friend, family member, or advocate to come to meetings; and
- Work with clients towards reaching self-reliance.

This will be achieved by:

- Providing a response to applications no later than 2 business days of verifying all required documents;
- If approved, issuing payment within the same timeframe;
- Returning telephone and e-mail messages within 2 business days;
- Assisting with filing an appeal if a client does not agree with a decision; and
- Conducting periodic customer satisfaction surveys to ensure optimum service.

Income Assistance

Program Overview

The Income Assistance program supports Northwest Territories residents by providing financial assistance for the basic living needs of food, clothing, shelter, and utilities. The benefits paid to clients enable them to purchase healthy food, warm clothing, as well as cover the actual costs of their shelter and utility expenses.

The Income Assistance program further supports clients in returning to the labour force by providing benefits for education and training costs, child care expenses, and record suspension application fees. Clients can also receive assistance with the security deposits needed to obtain a home, and a furnishings allowance to purchase household goods. Furthermore, additional allowances are also provided to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Table 1 summarizes the total number of distinct cases and total expenditures for the Income Assistance program over the past five fiscal years. Each distinct case includes a single individual or a family (parent(s) and child(ren)). The statistics show that the number of distinct cases has steadily declined over the five year period, while expenditures have increased. This is a result of the continual increase in the cost of living as the Income Assistance program pays market rental assistance, as well as the actual cost of fuel and utilities. Additionally, clients are accessing Income Assistance benefits for longer time periods.

Table 1: Income Assistance Statistics

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Distinct Cases	Expenditures
2009-2010	3,383	$14,865,692
2010-2011	3,339	$15,288,971
2011-2012	3,321	$15,762,161
2012-2013	3,188	$16,160,994
2013-2014	3,092	$16,937,341

Productive Choice

An integral component of the Income Assistance program is the participation in a Productive Choice. The purpose of a Productive Choice is to engage clients in activities that will help lead to self-reliance. Productive Choice activities support clients by promoting decision-making and accountability.

Productive Choice activities include participation in the labour force, wellness activities, unpaid community work, traditional activities, education and training, career counselling, and parenting or care of family members. Seniors and clients with long-term or permanent disabilities are exempt from participating in the Productive Choice requirement.

Client Services Officers work with clients to assess their individual needs and make appropriate referrals to community programs and services. Upon arriving at an agreed Productive Choice for a client, Client Services Officers provide a range of services, which include:

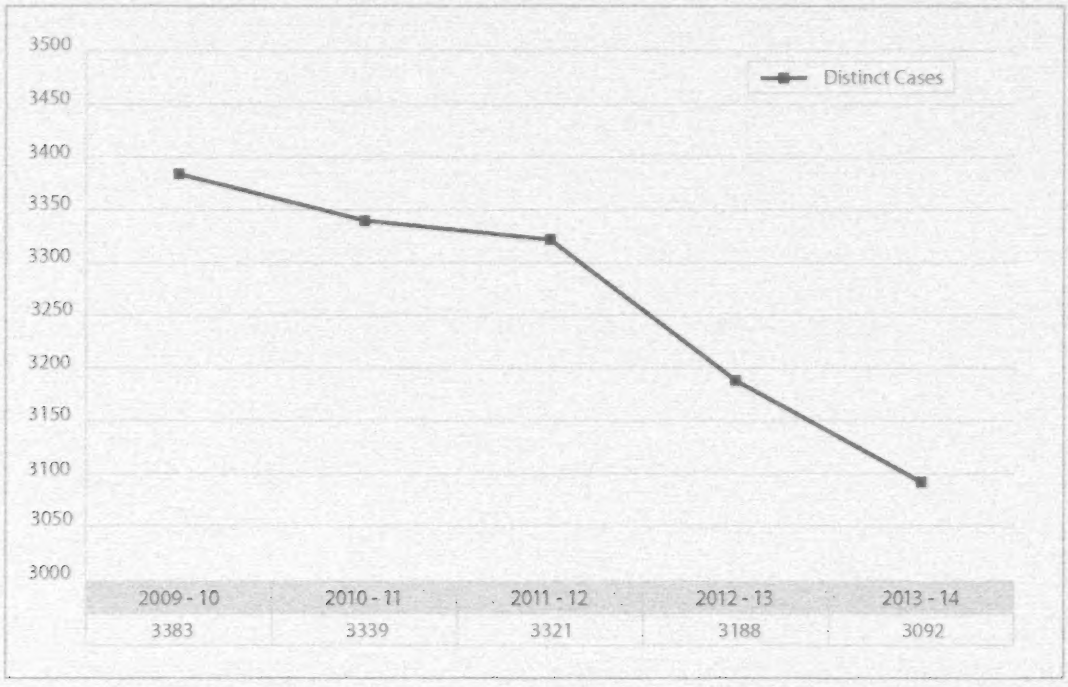
- Helping clients identify strengths, challenges, interests, capacity, and resources;
- Working with clients towards a mutually agreed upon vision, plan, and goal;
- Matching client needs with service providers; and
- Promoting and supporting of client well-being through the development of skills and abilities to improve the clients' quality of life.

The Department of Education Culture and Employment will be reviewing the Productive Choice component of the Income Assistance program in 2014-2015.

Program Accomplishments

During 2013-2014, the Income Assistance program had the lowest number of distinct cases in the past five years, as seen in Figure 1 below. This is a great accomplishment as clients are moving forward in becoming self-reliant.

Figure 1: Total Number of Income Assistance Distinct Cases



In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Income Assistance program, performance targets and outcome measures were established for the first time in 2013-2014. Focus was given to clients deemed to be employable based on their age and personal circumstances. The goal of the targets was to ensure that clients are moving forward in reaching self-reliance.

Over the past year, the Income Assistance program has successfully:

- Reduced case load traffic by over 20% by placing longer-term clients on different reporting schedules to ensure certain client groups are not required to report monthly; and
- Referred over 20% of long-term employable clients aged 19-29 to career counselling.

Going forward to 2014-2015, Income Assistance will continue to refer employable clients to career counselling opportunities with a 50% referral target.

In 2013-2014, the Income Assistance program undertook an internal review of the eligibility requirements for the rental allowance to determine if the needs of clients were being met. Policies were implemented that removed the barriers faced by some clients when trying to access affordable housing.

Additional policy amendments were implemented throughout the year that excluded certain types of income from the calculation of benefits. Program enhancements were also put in place that makes it easier for clients living in shared accommodations to receive heating fuel.

Audit and Compliance

Audit and compliance standards ensure staff are delivering programs consistent with the applicable legislation and polices, and to protect the integrity of Income Security programs.

During 2013-2014, the Income Security Programs Division developed and implemented a process for conducting Income Assistance file reviews. File reviews are conducted on a monthly basis. In addition to the file reviews, Income Assistance compliance audits were completed in the communities of Fort McPherson, Łutselk'e, Tulita, Fort Simpson, and Fort Smith.

Income Assistance file reviews and compliance audits will continue in 2014-2015.

Appeals

All Income Assistance clients have the right to appeal decisions made regarding their eligibility and level of benefits. This right provides clients with the opportunity to verify they are receiving the appropriate benefits and that front-line staff are assessing them in accordance with program legislation.

The Income Assistance Program has two levels of appeal:

1. Social Assistance Appeal Committee (Committee); and
2. Social Assistance Appeal Board (Board).

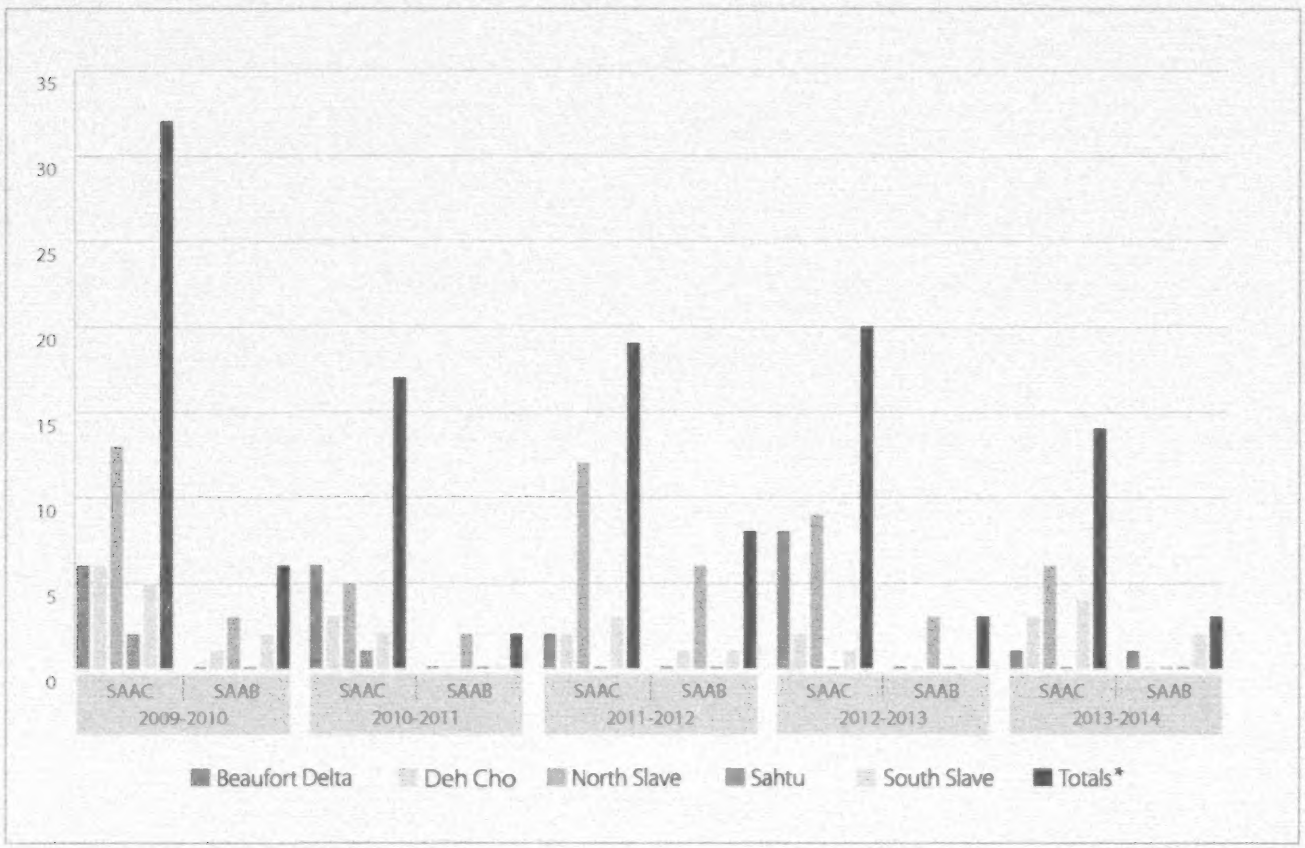
The latter is used if the Committee's decision is unsatisfactory to either the client or the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

There are 22 Committees with a total of 61 members that hear Income Assistance appeals for all Northwest Territories communities. Five members are appointed to the Board to hear appeals of Committee decisions. The role of the Committee and Board is to ensure the Client Services Officer has made decisions in accordance with program policies and legislation.

Clients have seven calendar days to appeal a decision in writing to the Registrar of Appeals who coordinates the appeal hearing. First level appeal hearings must be heard and a decision rendered within 30 days of the filing of an application to appeal. Second level appeals to the Board have 45 days from the filing to be completed.

The following graph (Figure 2) summarizes the number of appeals heard by the Committee and Board by region for the past five fiscal years. The statistics show that the Committee heard the fewest appeals in 2013-2014. Overall, the number of appeals heard by the Board has been decreasing over the past five years.

Figure 2: Income Assistance Appeals



SAAC: Social Assistance Appeal Committee
SAAB: Social Assistance Appeal Board
** For figures, please see page 31.*

Senior Home Heating Subsidy

Program Overview

The Senior Home Heating Subsidy allows low to modest income seniors pay for the cost of heating their homes. Eligible seniors are able to purchase a set amount of wood, oil, propane, gas, and/or electricity depending on their household income and the community in which they live.

Table 2 summarizes the total number of distinct cases and total expenditures for the Senior Home Heating Subsidy over the past five fiscal years. Each distinct case includes a single individual or a family (senior and spouse). The statistics show that the number of distinct cases has increased by 87 compared to the previous fiscal year, which is an increase of 19%. Expenditures have generally increased over the five year period, with a substantial increase of 30% compared to last year.

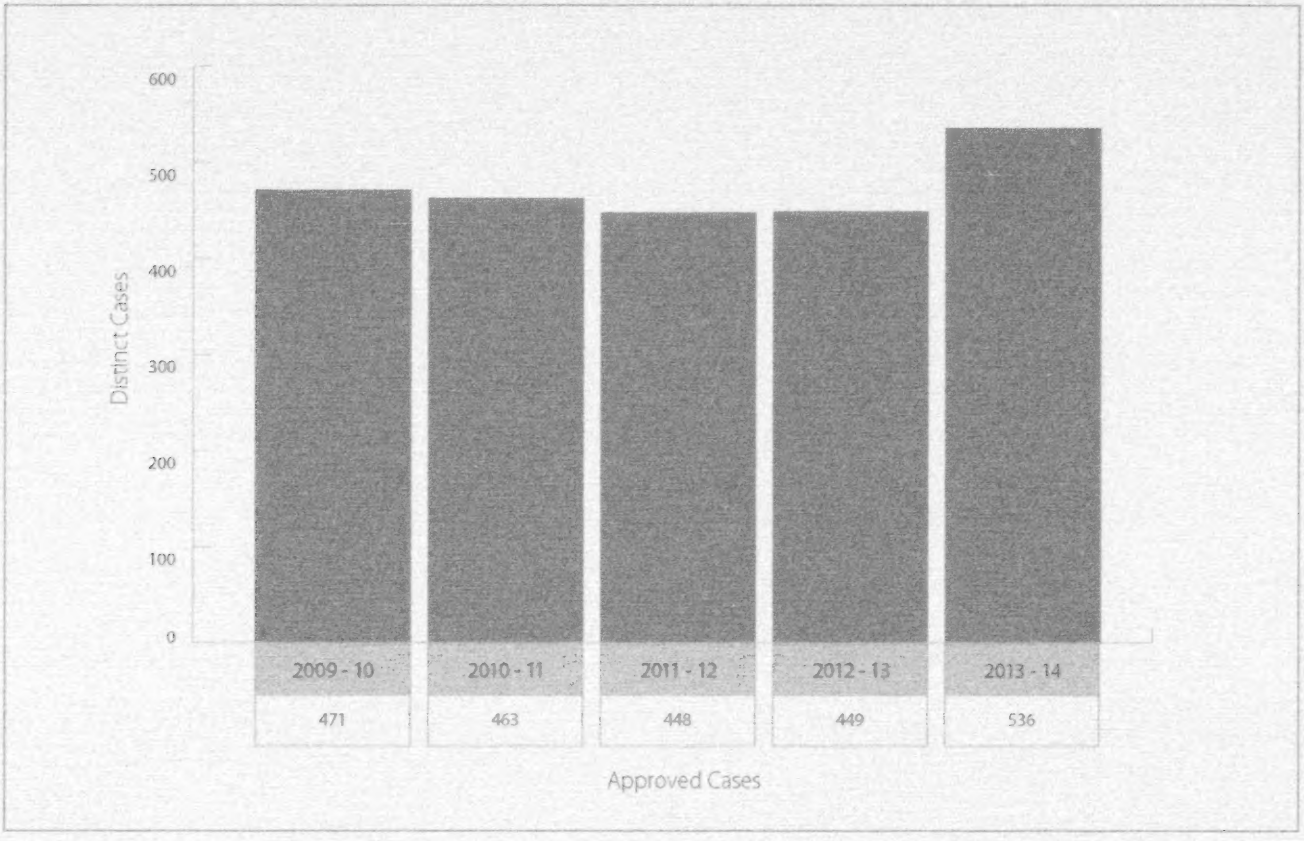
Table 2: Senior Home Heating Subsidy Statistics

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Distinct Cases	Expenditures
2009-2010	471	$1,048,956
2010-2011	463	$1,126,994
2011-2012	448	$1,268,759
2012-2013	449	$1,261,461
2013-2014	536	$1,642,126

Program Accomplishments

The Senior Home Heating Subsidy had the highest number of recipients in 2013-2014 as seen in Figure 3 below. This is a significant accomplishment for the program as a greater number of seniors were able to receive assistance with the high cost of heating their homes. This achievement is a result of key program enhancements that were implemented during the year.

Figure 3: Total Number of Senior Home Heating Subsidy Distinct Cases



Over the past year, the Income Security Programs Division has increased eligibility for the Senior Home Heating Subsidy by excluding the income of residents other than the senior and his/her spouse from the calculation of benefit levels. This resulted in a simplified application process for seniors by no longer requiring income verification from extended family living in the household. The application process was further simplified by clarifying the documents required to provide proof of homeownership.

Going forward, the Income Security Programs Division will continue to review administrative processes in order to enhance service to seniors.

Audit and Compliance

Audit and compliance standards ensure staff are delivering programs consistent with the applicable legislation and polices, and to protect the integrity of Income Security programs.

During 2013-2014, the Income Security Programs Division developed and implemented a process for conducting Senior Home Heating Subsidy file reviews. File reviews are conducted on a monthly basis. In addition to the file reviews, Senior Home Heating Subsidy compliance audits were completed in the communities of Fort McPherson, Łutselk'e, Tulita, Fort Simpson, and Fort Smith.

Senior Home Heating Subsidy file reviews and compliance audits will continue in 2014-2015.

Appeals

All Senior Home Heating Subsidy clients have the right to appeal decisions made regarding their eligibility and level of benefits. This right provides clients with the opportunity to verify they are receiving the appropriate benefits and that front-line staff are assessing them in accordance with program legislation.

There are two levels of appeal under the Senior Home Heating Guidelines:

1. An internal review by two or more Regional Managers; and
2. The Administrative Review Group.

Clients have 30 calendar days to appeal a decision in writing to the Registrar of Appeals who coordinates the internal review. Both levels of appeal are heard within 30 days of receiving the appeal.

There have been no appeals regarding Senior Home Heating Subsidy benefits at either the first or second level over the past five years. This is due to the fact that clients have the ability to have their file re-assessed based on their current year income, should they not qualify based on their prior year income.

Student Financial Assistance

Program Overview

The Student Financial Assistance program assists Northwest Territories residents in pursuing a postsecondary education through a combination of grants and loans. Student Financial Assistance benefits help students pay for their tuition, book, travel, and living expenses. Additional grants are also available to students with permanent disabilities so they are able to participate fully in a postsecondary environment.

Indigenous Aboriginal residents are able to finance their postsecondary education solely through grant funding from the Student Financial Assistance program. Upon completion of their studies they will not be burdened with the repayment of student loans.

Students who complete any of grades 1 through 12 in the Northwest Territories can receive a remissible loan to help pay for their living expenses, in addition to grants for tuition, book, and travel costs. Upon the successful completion of postsecondary studies, students are able to have their remissible loan forgiven if they reside in the Northwest Territories.

The remission component of the Student Financial Assistance program plays an essential part in alleviating student debt. Remission has also become increasingly important in recruiting educated residents to return to the Northwest Territories after completing their studies.

The Student Financial Assistance program is one of the best student aid programs in Canada. Promoting the program is essential in making residents aware of the benefits of seeking a postsecondary education. Presentations and kiosks that provide program information are set up throughout the North. In addition, a Facebook page and revised website were launched in June 2014 to enhance communication with students and further promote the program. The Facebook page also is used to link graduating students with job opportunities in both the GNWT and private sector.

Table 3 summarizes the total number of approved applications and total expenditures for the Student Financial Assistance program over the past five fiscal years. Each approved application represents a student who received benefits during the academic year, which runs from September 1 to August 31. Expenditures are reported by the government fiscal year; April 1 to March 31. The statistics show that the number of approved applications and expenditures has fluctuated slightly over the previous five years.

Table 3: Student Financial Assistance Statistics

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Approved Applications	Expenditures
2009-2010	1,380	$13,085,036
2010-2011	1,493	$15,564,412
2011-2012	1,518	$16,465,200
2012-2013	1,507	$16,371,424
2013-2014	1,456	$16,306,193

Program Accomplishments

Over the past year, the Student Financial Assistance program has made a number of significant program enhancements to benefit students. The Student Financial Assistance program has increased the monthly living allowance for students and also increased the grant for students with permanent disabilities. In addition, the income test for part-time course reimbursement was eliminated to allow more students to receive assistance with part-time studies. The remission process was simplified to reduce the paperwork required for students to have their loans forgiven.

Going forward, the Student Financial Assistance program will review options for improving tuition and book rates to better meet the needs of students. The administration of the travel benefit will be reviewed to determine the effectiveness of current processes. A comprehensive review will also be undertaken to explore options for improving remission and repayment incentives with the goal of encouraging current students to return to the Northwest Territories upon completion of their program; thus enhancing the labour force and supporting the Northwest Territories Growth Strategy.

Audit and Compliance

Audit and compliance standards ensure staff are delivering programs consistent with the applicable legislation and polices and to protect the integrity of Income Security programs.

During 2013-2014, the Income Security Programs Division developed and implemented a process for conducting Student Financial Assistance file reviews. File reviews are conducted on a monthly basis. In addition to the file reviews, a Student Financial Assistance compliance audit was also completed. Furthermore, a quarter of all remission applications were audited throughout the year.

Student Financial Assistance file reviews, compliance audits, and remission audits will continue in 2014-2015.

Appeals

All Student Financial Assistance clients have the right to appeal decisions made regarding their eligibility and level of benefits. This right provides clients with the opportunity to verify they are receiving the appropriate benefits and that front-line staff are assessing them in accordance with program legislation.

The Student Financial Assistance program has two levels of appeal:

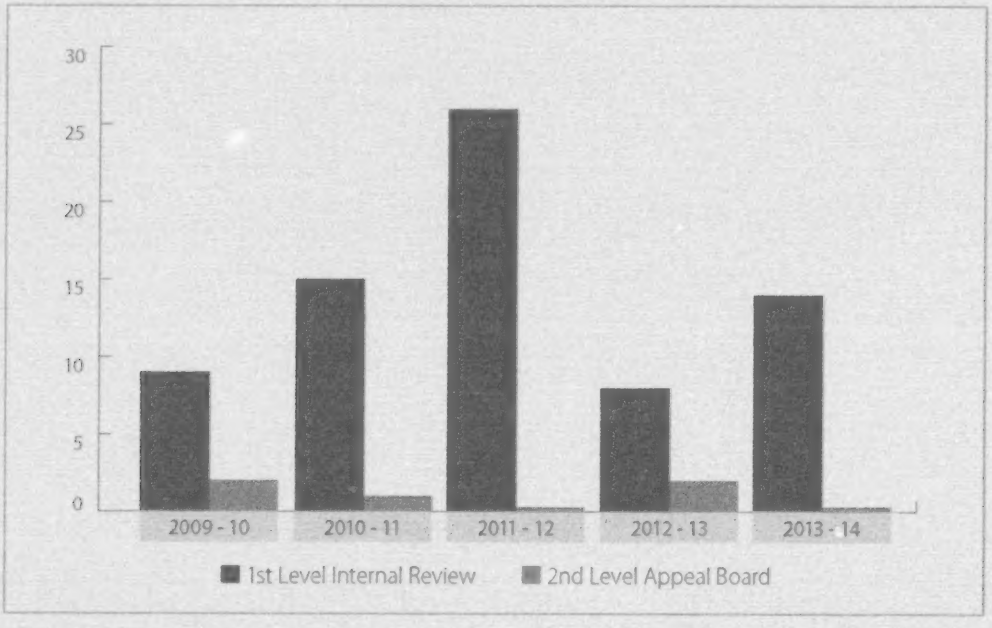
1. Internal Review; and
2. Student Financial Assistance Appeal Board.

Clients have 30 days to submit an appeal in writing to the Internal Review. The Internal Review is comprised of departmental staff who review the file to ensure that the *Student Financial Assistance Act*, regulations and policies have been applied correctly.

If students are not satisfied with the decision made by the Internal Review, they may submit an appeal to the Student Financial Assistance Appeal Board. The Student Financial Assistance Appeal Board is composed of five members of the public. Students may attend the second level appeal, obtain legal representation, or have someone speak on his/her behalf, such as an advocate, parent, or friend.

The following graph (Figure 4) summarizes the number of appeals heard by the Internal Review and Student Financial Assistance Appeal Board over the past five academic years. The number of first level appeals has fluctuated over the past five years. The Student Financial Assistance Appeal Board has heard very few appeals over the same time period.

Figure 4: Student Financial Assistance Appeals



** *For figures, please see page 31.*

Other Income Security Programs

Income Security Programs have additional programs that are administered by the Federal government. This results in a harmonized delivery system and application process for both federal and territorial benefits.

Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit

The Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit helps offset the high cost of living by providing financial assistance to Northwest Territories seniors. A monthly cash payment is paid to low-income seniors who are receiving federal Old Age Security benefits.

Table 4 summarizes the number of clients and total expenditures for the Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit over the past five fiscal years. The statistics indicate that both the number of clients and total expenditures have remained relatively constant over the five year period.

Table 4: Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit Statistics

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Clients	Expenditures
2009-2010	1,236	$2,382,840
2010-2011	1,217	$1,956,548
2011-2012	1,231	$2,124,180
2012-2013	1,214	$2,097,539
2013-2014	1,206	$2,042,760

Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit

The Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit helps low-income families with the costs of raising children. Monthly benefits for eligible families are automatically attached to the National Child Benefit cheque received from the federal government.

Table 5 summarizes the average number of clients and total expenditures for the Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit over the past five fiscal years. The data provided by the Canada Revenue Agency does not report on distinct cases for the fiscal year; therefore, the number of clients is based on the average for the fiscal year. The statistics indicate that both the average number of clients and total expenditures have continued to decrease over the past five years.

Table 5: Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit Statistics

Fiscal Year	Average Number of Families	Expenditures
2009-2010	1,765	$1,322,803
2010-2011	1,700	$1,251,083
2011-2012	1,609	$1,226,581
2012-2013	1,554	$1,175,011
2013-2014	1,527	$1,147,539

Territorial Workers' Supplement

The Territorial Workers' Supplement is a benefit included with the Northwest Territories Child Tax Benefit that helps low-income families with the costs of raising children.

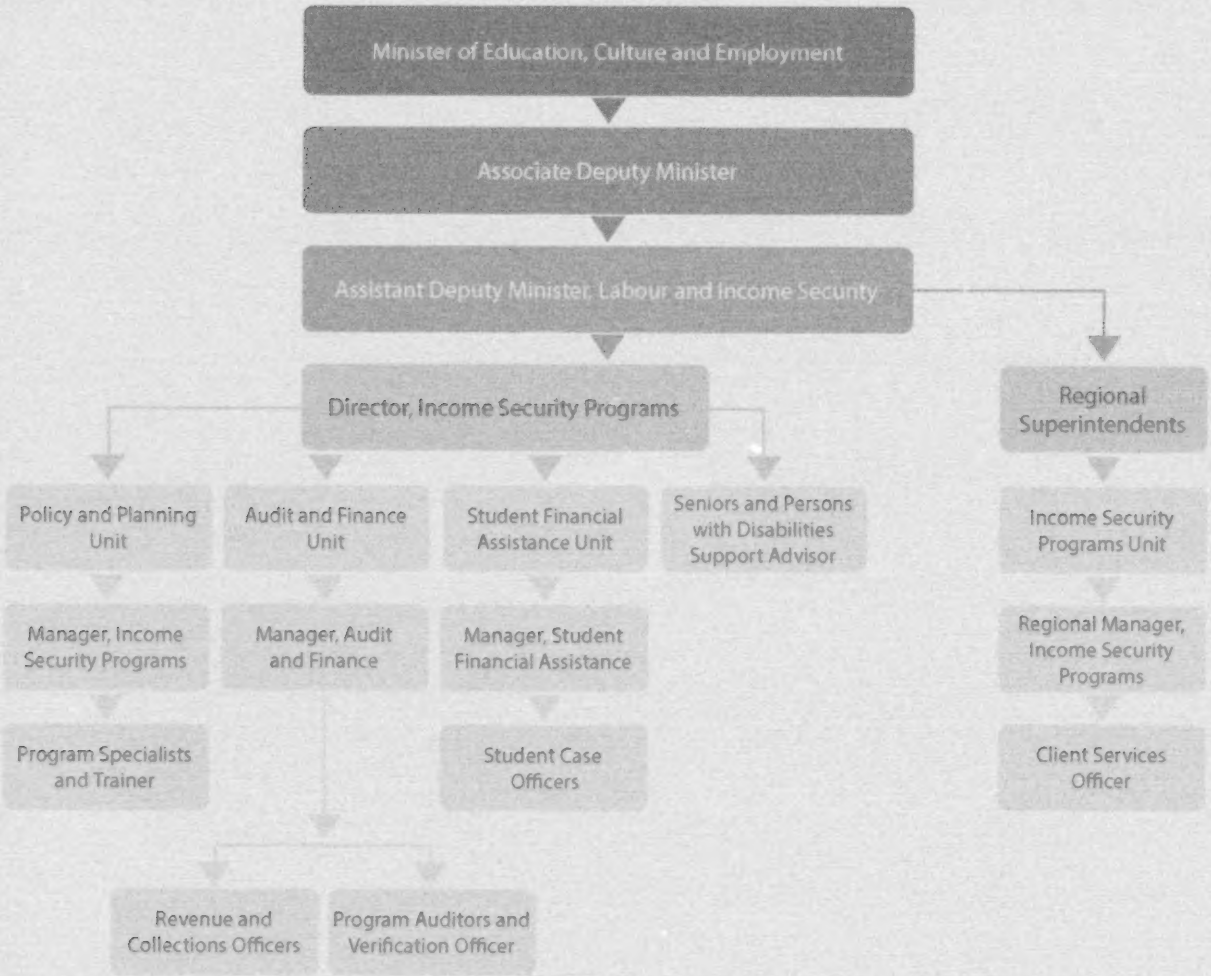
Table 6 summarizes the average number of clients and total expenditures for the Territorial Workers' Supplement over the past five fiscal years. The data provided by the Canada Revenue Agency does not report on distinct cases for the fiscal year; therefore, the number of clients is based on the average for the fiscal year. The statistics indicate that both the average number of clients and total expenditures have continued to decrease over the past five years.

Table 6: Territorial Workers' Supplement Statistics

Fiscal Year	Average Numbers of Families	Expenditures
2009-2010	1,225	$323,924
2010-2011	1,114	$295,141
2011-2012	1,043	$273,829
2012-2013	948	$248,987
2013-2014	904	$237,349

Income Security Programs Division Overview

Organizational Structure


Minister of Education, Culture and Employment
Associate Deputy Minister
Assistant Deputy Minister, Labour and Income Security
Director, Income Security Programs
Regional Superintendents
Policy and Planning Unit
Audit and Finance Unit
Student Financial Assistance Unit
Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Support Advisor
Income Security Programs Unit
Manager, Income Security Programs
Manager, Audit and Finance
Manager, Student Financial Assistance
Regional Manager, Income Security Programs
Program Specialists and Trainer
Student Case Officers
Client Services Officer
Revenue and Collections Officers
Program Auditors and Verification Officer

Roles and Responsibilities

Headquarters

Policy and Planning Unit

The purpose of the Policy and Planning unit is to develop policy, conduct research and program analysis to improve Income Security programs. The unit provides strategic support to senior management, facilitates program development, and provides guidance to regional program delivery teams.

The Policy and Planning unit is responsible for the development of all communications materials. The unit evaluates and reports on Income Security programs and participates on multiple teams and committees, including federal/provincial/territorial groups.

Information Systems assists the Policy and Planning unit through the implementation of information systems and technologies. Information Systems designs and develops computer applications and reporting capabilities to improve operations of the Income Security Programs Division. Information Systems provides services such as Help Desk, database requests and inquiries, business processes, computer application selection and implementation, and web design.

Audit and Finance Unit

The Audit and Finance unit administers the forgiveness and repayment of Northwest Territories student loans. This is done centrally from Headquarters by three Finance Officers.

The primary role of the two Program Auditors is to address program compliance issues and to improve systems and procedures related to risk management and internal controls. In addition, the Verification Officer provides verification support services by obtaining highly confidential information about clients and ensuring completeness and accuracy of applications.

Student Financial Assistance Unit

The Student Financial Assistance program is delivered centrally from Headquarters by four Student Case Officers. On average, over 1,400 applications are paid each year with two primary application intakes for programs starting in the fall and winter semesters. Student Case Officers travel throughout the Northwest Territories to provide program information sessions to parents and students. In addition, Student Case Officers liaise with high schools, postsecondary institutions, and Aboriginal governments and organizations.

Regional Delivery

Income Security Programs Division Staff

Regional staff are responsible for the delivery of the Income Assistance and the Senior Home Heating Subsidy programs. Each region comprises a Regional Superintendent, Regional Manager, and Client Services Officers who determine eligibility for both programs. Client Services Officers also focus on the aspects of service management in helping clients reach the goal of self-reliance.

The five regional centres are located in Inuvik, Norman Wells, Yellowknife, Fort Smith, and Fort Simpson. Communities that do not have a full-time Client Services Officer are able to access Income Security programs through telephone, fax, email services, or regularly scheduled visits from itinerant Client Services Officers.

As of March 2014, there were 28 Client Services Officers appointed under the *Social Assistance Act*, located in 18 communities in the Northwest Territories. This included three itinerant Client Services Officers who do not carry a static caseload. They are required to travel within their region, and sometimes to other regions throughout the Northwest Territories, to deliver programs when Client Services Officers are away from the office. The map on the next page (Figure 5) indicates the location and number of Client Services Officers.

Figure 5: Location of Client Services Officers

Staffing

In response to the recommendations made by the Auditor General of Canada, the Income Security Programs Division created two additional full-time positions in 2013-2014:

1. A new Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Support Advisor who will provide specialized advice on how to improve Income Security programs for seniors and persons with disabilities. This position will aid in the development of policies and procedures specific to persons with disabilities on a territorial wide basis.
2. An additional Program Auditor to assist with compliance audits. The Income Security Programs Division is committed to reviewing client files to ensure that programs are delivered in accordance with applicable legislation and policies.

Table 7 provides statistics on the total number of positions within the Income Security Programs Division. In 2013-2014, approximately two thirds of all positions were filled by Indigenous Aboriginal employees. As of March 31, 2014, all vacant positions were in the competition process and subsequently staffed in 2014-2015.

Table 7: Income Security Programs Division Staffing Statistics

Total Positions	Indigenous Aboriginal	Indigenous Non-Aboriginal	No Priority	Vacant
69 (100%)	**45** (65%)	**13** (19%)	**5** (7%)	**6** (9%)

Workplace Safety

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has a responsibility to ensure that employees work in a healthy and safe environment. Discussion with some clients can be emotional and stressful, causing them to react in an unfriendly manner. Additionally, Client Services Officers located in small and remote communities often work in isolation.

In 2013-2014, Client Services Officers were provided with focused training that was designed to help mitigate risk and implement personal safety strategies, including:

- Mental Health First Aid;
- Non-Violent Crisis Intervention;
- Verbal Judo; and
- Workplace safety training.

In addition to training, several offices have been renovated and equipped with security measures such as, glass partitions, service windows, client interview rooms, and alternate exit doors.

Going forward, the Income Security Programs Division will continue to monitor workplace safety to ensure a safe environment for all staff.

Training

Training is a key component to ensuring Income Security programs are being delivered consistently and fairly across the Northwest Territories. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment will continue to provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for employees.

During 2013-2014, Client Services Officers received training in 14 different training modules, both mandatory and supplemental. There were a combined total of 223 distinct occurrences of participation across all courses.

Training Accomplishments in 2013-2014

Throughout 2013-2014, several training methods were developed and improved in order to provide consistency and excellence in service delivery. These training methods included:

1. Development of a Client Services Officer Competency Model, Skills Gap Assessment, and Training Plan;
2. Improvement to Statutory Training via face-to-face and online/distance delivery;
3. Advancements in web-based training delivered through GoTo Meetings and ProProfs;
4. Attendance at the annual Client Services Officer Conference;
5. Creation of a SharePoint site; and
6. Distribution of a quarterly Client Services Officer Newsletter.

1. Client Services Officer Competency Model

The model was developed to identify any areas for performance improvement so that employee skills can be enhanced in a way that meets or exceeds job requirements.

In 2013-2014, a detailed analysis of the Client Services Officer job description, legislation, policies, guidelines, manuals, and resources was undertaken. The analysis produced a list of competencies and personal characteristics that distinguished effective Client Services Officers and provided specific indicators for each competency. The competencies identified were then compared to the GNWT employee competency model and an assessment tool was created.

The assessment tool assists with evaluating:

- How the employee's behaviours align with the GNWT competencies;
- How the employee's skills and abilities align with the position's technical competencies; and
- What gaps exist between the employee's performance and the expected or optimal performance.

Going forward in 2014-2015, all Client Services Officers will have a training plan developed based on the gaps identified in the assessment tool. Additionally, a Student Case Officer competency model will be developed.

2. Income Assistance Statutory Training

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment requires all Client Services Officers to successfully complete a two-week statutory training course in order to receive their statutory designation under the *Social Assistance Act*. This designation gives Client Services Officers the authority to assess client eligibility, evaluate their financial needs, and issue payments.

3. Web-based Training

The use of technology in training allows for an accessible, flexible, customizable, and cost-effective alternative to face-to-face training. Go-To Meetings and ProProfs are software applications that were introduced in the 2013-2014 fiscal year to provide Income Security Programs Division web-based training.

In 2013-2014, Go-To Meetings was used to train 34 employees on the Document Storage Module, and three employees on Case Management Administration System web reporting. ProProfs allows for the creation and tracking of quizzes and surveys and was used primarily for refresher training. Additional web-based training will be developed and delivered in 2014-2015.

4. Client Services Officer Conference

The annual Client Services Officer Conference took place February 18-20, 2014. The conference was attended by 27 Client Services Officers and 3 Headquarters staff.

Topics covered included:

- Safety training for Client Services Officers (delivered by the Department of Justice);
- Wellness Strategies for the Helping Professional (delivered by the Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute);
- Addictions and Mental Health Disorders;
- Disability Awareness and Sensitivity; and
- Recent policy changes and amendments.

The feedback solicited from conference participants was very positive. Generally, Client Services Officers felt that the overview of recent policy changes and amendments was particularly useful and they appreciated the opportunity to provide suggestions; many of which have already been incorporated into the most recent policy amendments.

The next Client Services Officer Conference is scheduled for February 2015.

5. SharePoint

In December 2013, the Income Security Programs Division created a sub-site within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's SharePoint. The Income Security Programs Division SharePoint provides a more effective and user-friendly portal for document and file management, collaboration, and online discussions. The SharePoint site became fully accessible to all Income Security Programs Division employees in early March 2014 and is used to distribute manuals, access standardized forms, and provide a forum for questions.

6. Client Services Officer Newsletter

The Client Services Officer Newsletter is a tool that allows for the sharing of information, best practices, and to reinforce important program changes. The newsletter also provides helpful reminders and strategies for improved health and wellness. Client Services Officers are encouraged to provide input and content for the newsletter. The newsletter is issued on a quarterly basis and is communicated to all Income Security Programs Division staff via SharePoint.

Conclusion

The Income Security Programs Division has made significant progress in 2013-14. Great strides were made in improving efficiencies and providing better services and programs for residents of the Northwest Territories.

The Income Security Programs Division works diligently to ensure that residents have access to the services they need when they need them. Improvements in training, program compliance, policy clarification, and program evaluation were all steps towards providing a more transparent and accountable set of programs.

While 2013-2014 saw many improvements to Income Security programs, there are a number of areas that will require more attention. Moving forward in 2014-2015, there are plans to fine tune improvements to services by clarifying policies, procedures, and guidelines; continue monitoring client files for compliance and conducting regular audits to ensure clients receive the benefits to which they are entitled; and continue to provide training to employees that supports their professional development.

Furthermore, in the upcoming year the Income Security Programs Division will continue to enhance upon the performance targets for the Income Assistance program. A review of the Productive Choice requirement under the Income Assistance program will be conducted, as well as a review of remission and repayment incentives under Student Financial Assistance.

The Income Security Programs Division continues to be committed to delivering the best service possible to the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Contact Information

Headquarters
Lahm Ridge Tower
4501 – 50th Avenue
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Tel: 867-920-8921
Toll-Free Tel: 1-866-973-7252
Fax: 867-867-0443

Beaufort Delta ECE Service Centre
GNWT Multi-Use Building
106 Veterans Way
Bag Service #1
Inuvik, NT X0E 0T0

Tel: 867-777-7365
Toll-Free Tel: 1-855-283-9311
Fax: 867-777-7218

Deh Cho ECE Service Centre
Deh Cho Regional
Education Centre
9802 – 98 Avenue
Box 740
Fort Simpson, NT X0E 0N0

Tel: 867-695-7338
Fax: 867-695-7351

North Slave ECE Service Centre
Nova Plaza, Main Floor
5019 – 52 Street
Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Tel: 867-766-5100
Toll-Free Tel: 1-866-768-8145
Fax: 867-873-0423

Sahtu ECE Service Centre
Edward G. Hodgson Building
1A Raven Road
Box 147
Norman Wells, NT X0E 0V0

Tel: 867-587-7157
Toll-Free Tel: 1-866-814-9840
Fax: 867-587-2612

South Slave ECE Service Centres
Fort Smith ECE Service Centre
Sweetgrass Building
177 McDougal Road
Box 1406
Fort Smith, NT X0E 0P0

Tel: 867-872-7425
Fax: 867-872-4507

Hay River ECE Service Centre
Court House Building
8 Capital Drive
Hay River, NT X0E 1G2

Tel: 867-874-5050
Fax: 867-874-5062

Appendix A

Summary of Commitments made to the Auditor General of Canada

Recommendation: **The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) should clarify policies, procedures and guidelines outlining Income Security program delivery requirements and how to meet them. It should ensure staff understand and are following procedures and guidelines.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Produced and implemented an Income Assistance Policy Manual, Verification Manual and a Client Services Officer Resource and Procedures Manual	October 2012	Completed These are living documents that will be updated as policies change.
Rewrite Senior Home Heating Subsidy Guidelines to ensure clarification on when the subsidy can be used	October 2013	Completed
Dedicate staff for persons with disabilities and seniors	May 2013	Completed Position staffed in July 2014.
Develop and implement a delivery system for seniors and persons with disabilities	August 2013	In-Progress
Train Regional Managers on using existing reports to monitor, track and set targets	November 2013	Completed
Develop, in partnership with other social envelop departments, an integrated service management approach that is client-centered	2013-14	In-Progress
Ongoing use of technology to deliver training	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
Use various media to ensure knowledge of requirements and procedures such as through staff Newsletter	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
Implement a work load standard for CSOs	2014-15	In-Progress
Align training with core competency	2013-14	Ongoing
Reduce case load traffic by placing more longer term clients on different reporting schedules to ensure certain specific client groups are not required to report monthly	2013-14	Completed/Ongoing
Develop curriculum for service management	2013-14	In-Progress
Support *Building on the Strength of Northerners – A Strategic Framework toward with Elimination of Poverty in the NWT*	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing

Recommendation: **As ECE introduces its revised Child Care User Subsidy (CCUS), it should develop clear guidelines that are consistent with program requirements and clearly communicate these requirements to front-line staff and potential applicants.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Make changes to the Child Care Benefit. These changes include a streamlined application process and the ability for CSOs to make timely payments	September 2012	Completed
All staff to be trained using a web based delivery method	September 2012	Completed
Commitment to ongoing training	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
Produce training plans for staff	2014	Completed/Ongoing
Support Right from the Start: *A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT*	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing

Recommendation: **ECE should ensure Regional Managers and supervisors formally monitor client files. The monitoring should include regularly scheduled reviews of client files as well as the use of standard templates in regions to help ensure a consistent approach. In cases where monitoring uncovers deficiencies or other issues, regional managers and supervisors should follow-up formally.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Meeting to finalize the audit tool	January 2013	Completed/Ongoing
Establish a process for monthly reviews, reporting process and monthly follow up	March 2013	Completed
Continued support of monitoring process through training and guidance	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
Continued monitoring of regional auditing, including setting targets for performance	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
The Director of Income Security Programs will monitor all audits	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing

Recommendation: **ECE should clarify program requirements for Productive Choices in its guidance to CSOs and clearly communicate them. Regional Managers should monitor compliance with Productive Choice requirements and take corrective action where necessary.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
The standard audit tool includes a review by the Regional Managers of participation in Productive Choices	March 2013	Completed
Determine a work load standard for CSOs	2013/2014	In-Progress
Consistent and regular training	Ongoing	Completed/Ongoing
Competency evaluations conducted for all staff to ensure skills match required competency	2013-14	Complete

Recommendation: **In accordance with its program requirements, ECE should audit a selection of Income Security files periodically to ensure clients receive benefits to which they are entitled. ECE should establish a framework to identify files to audit, based on pre-determined criteria. Results should be reported to the Director of Income Security annually.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Complete five community audits in 2012-13	March 2013	Completed
Report on findings	June 2013	Completed
An audit manual for the Program Auditor that includes a framework for file reviews	October 2012	Completed
Secure additional resources for the audit section to work in partnership with the collections of IA client overpayments	2013-14	Completed
Determine training needs for Program Auditing staff	2013-14	Completed/Ongoing
Initiate audits of 10% of SFA files	March 2014	Completed
Professional development for Program Auditor	2013-14	Complete/Ongoing
Ensure appropriate training is in place for staff	2013-14	Complete/Ongoing

Recommendation: **When ECE identifies Income Assistance overpayments, it should comply with the Financial Administration Manual requirements for collecting overpayments. It should follow collection procedures through issuing invoices and written notifications, and forward outstanding debts to the Department of Finance for collection when required.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Review required changes to CMAS	2013-14	In-Progress
Reconcile debts in CMAS	September 2013	Completed
Verify all outstanding overpayments	September 2013	Completed
Follow the process for statue barred debts	April 2013	In-Progress
Invoices issued using the GNWT SAM system	2013-14	In-Progress
Complete required changes to CMAS	2013-14	In-Progress
Ensure appropriate staffing levels to prevent overpayments and assure recovery where appropriate	2013-14	In-Progress
Training in place to prevent overpayments	2014-15	In-Progress

Recommendation: **ECE should modify its management of student loans to ensure that identification of student loans due for repayment is not solely reliant on student notification or manual review by officials.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Review of remission rates	2013-14	In-Progress
Develop a loans policy/procedure manual	November 2013	In-Progress
Complete loan audit on loan remission/repayment process and collection	2013-14	Completed
Enhance the automated process to identify loans due for repayment	2014-15	In-Progress
Development of a loans module in the GNWT SAM accounting system	2014-15	In-Progress

Recommendation: **ECE should formalize current and future competency-based training programs for CSOs and Student Case Officers. It should identify and provide core training so they can attain and maintain the competencies their job requires. The Department should also ensure staff members receive regular training updates, to ensure they fully understand income security program requirements.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Conduct annual performance appraisals	June 2013 and ongoing	Completed
Develop a competency model for CSOs	June 2013	Completed
Individual assessments on all CSOs and SCOs to identify training needs	August 2013	In-Progress
Monitoring new processes will identify training deficiencies to be incorporated in training activities	August 2013	Ongoing
All staff will take Mental Health First Aid Training	2013	Completed
Develop competency model for Student Case Officers	March 2014	In-Progress
Develop competency model for Regional Managers and the Manager of SFA	March 2014	In-Progress
Incorporate disability sensitivity and awareness training for staff	2013-14	In-Progress

Recommendation: **ECE should establish targets and outcome measures that align with the overall objective for its Income Security programs. ECE should review the data it currently collects on Income Security programs to ensure it has the data required to measure whether targets and outcomes are being met. ECE should develop a plan to identify when it will evaluate its program to determine if the objective of its Income Security programs is being met.**

COMMITMENT	DEADLINE	STATUS
Review data that is currently collected to determine success targets	August 2013	Completed
Complete a cost analysis of the indexing of the SFA living allowance	2013-14	In-Progress
Establish and set targets for longer term employable IA clients referrals to career counselling and involvement with training/skills development and/or work	2013-14	Completed
Set and report on targets	2013-14	Completed
Develop an annual report that will include: Income Security staff turnover, workplace safety issues, IA payment systems by community	April 2014	In-Progress
Automated reporting tool to report ability to track success through ECE programs	2014	In-Progress
Complete a cost analysis of the indexing of the SFA living allowance	2013-14	In-Progress
Increase index benefits under the IA program (food, clothing and incidentals)	2014-15	In-Progress
Program evaluation to determine if objectives are being met	2014-15	In-Progress
Conduct a cost analysis of providing an incidental allowance to all IA clients	2014-15	In-Progress
A complete review of the SFA Regulations making necessary amendments	2014-15	In-Progress
Conduct a review and report on the Productive Choice component of the IA program	2014-15	In-Progress
Complete a review of the SHHS income thresholds using the market basket measure	2015-16	In-Progress
In cooperation with the federal government and the NWT Bureau of Statistics develop a Northern basket measure	2015-16	In-Progress

Appendix B - Figures

*Figure 2: Income Assistance Appeals Totals

	2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
Beaufort Delta	6	0	6	0	2	0	8	0	1	1
Deh Cho	6	1	3	0	2	1	2	0	3	0
North Slave	13	3	5	2	12	6	9	3	6	0
Sahtu	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Slave	5	2	2	0	3	1	1	0	4	2
Totals	32	6	17	2	19	8	20	3	14	3

**Figure 4: Student Financial Assistance Appeals Totals

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
1st Level - Internal Review	9	15	26	8	14
2nd Level - Appeal Board	2	1	0	2	0

Kispin ki nitawihtin ā nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwēsinēn.

Cree

ʔerihtł'ís dëne sųłiné yati t'a huts'elkër xa beyéyati theɔ-ą ɔat'e, nuwe ts'ën yółti.

Chipewyan

If you would like this information in another official language, call us.

English

Si vous voulez ces renseignements en français, contactez-nous.

Français

Jii gwandak izhii ginjìk vat'atr'ijąhch'uu zhìt yinohthan jì', diits'àt ginohkhìi.

Gwich'in

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

ᑕᕐᔪᐊ ᑎᑎᖅᑲᓪᓕᒃ ᐱᓕᒍᔨᒻᒪᑦ ᐃᓄᖅᑐᑦᓯᓪᓗᒡᓗᑎᒃ, ᐅᕙᓪᓕᐊᓂᓄᑦ ᐅᖃᓕ ᓴᖅᑭᑐᑎᒃ.

Inuktitut

UVANITTUAQ ILITCHURISUKUPKU INUVIALUKTUN, QUQUAQLUTA.

Inuvialuktun

K'éhshó got'ıne xədǝ́ k'é hederi ɔedıhtl'é yeriniwę nídé dúle.

North Slavey

Edi gondı dehgéh got'ıe zhatié k'ę́ę́ edatł'éh enahddhę nide.

South Slavey

Thchǫ yati k'ę̀ę̀ dè wegodì wek'èhoızǫ nę̀ewǫ dè, gots'ǫ̀ goahde.

Thchǫ

1-867-920-3367

Lahm Ridge Tower, First Floor
4501 - 50th Avenue
Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
Tel: 867-920-8921
Toll-Free Tel: 1-866-973-7252
www.ece.gov.nt.ca

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment